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BOOK REVIEW

Senescence: The Last Half of Life. By G. STANLEY HALL. New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1922, 518 pp.

Having recently retired from the presidency of Clark University, which in 1889 he founded with the financial assistance of Mr. Jonas G. Clark of Worcester, Mass., Dr. Hall decided to take stock of himself, to go over himself physically and mentally most carefully, and to ascertain what it really means to be old (since that is what he was, according to established chronological standards), and how closely it approaches the condition agreed upon for it by long-inherited public opinion. That there was a wide discrepancy between the two will be seen later. Moreover, having spent many years of his life as a genetic psychologist in the study of infancy and childhood, puberty and adolescence, and later of adulthood and sex maturity, he felt that completeness of programme required that he study the last two stages of human life, viz., senescence (from forty, or earlier for women) to the climacteric; and senectitude, which is post-climacteric, or old age proper. Accordingly, he visited half a dozen or more physicians and experts, only to find how little was their knowledge and how great their disagreement concerning this stage of life. The library yielded him some five hundred books and articles on the subject, and the present volume is the result of all these investigations, studies, and the reflections based upon a long life creatively active in many fields (in some of which he was the pioneer) and upon a memory most abundantly and systematically stored with facts gleaned from all the sciences cognate to his own and from history and literature. Thus, while most of the book is in the nature of a comprehensive compendium, it may be said to be almost throughout both original and autobiographical, because not only is the Hall-mark on all the materials that percolated through his mind, but they are transformed, enriched, and given a setting in a larger whole, of which the original authors probably knew next to nothing.

The opening sentence of the Foreword reads: "In this book I have tried to present the subjects of Old Age and Death from as many viewpoints as possible in order to show how the ignorant and the learned, the child, the adult, and the old, savage and civilized man, pagans and Christians, the ancient and the modern world, the representatives of various sciences, and different individuals have viewed these problems, letting each class, so far as I could, speak for itself."

The fundamental thesis of the book is that senescents have a most important function in the world, particularly in these troublous days; one which they have not themselves appreciated or measured up to, because they have not realized "what ripe and normal age really is, means, can, should, and now must do, if our race is ever to achieve its true goal." This function is to distil from the experience of the past the wisdom necessary for the wholesome life of the present, "to gather the fruitage of the past and to penetrate further into the future." And old age is peculiarly fitted to do this because "withdrawal from biological phylectic functions is often marked by an Indian summer of increased clarity and efficiency in intellectual work. Not only does individuation now have its innings but the distractions from passion, the lust for wealth and power, and in general the struggle for place and fame, have abated and in their stead comes normally, not only a philosophic calm but a desire to sum up and evaluate all of life's experiences." Furthermore, the old are disillusioned, they see through the shams and

vanities of life, hence are better guides in the realms of politics, civics, economics, social relationships, sex, marriages, and the family, as well as religion and philosophy. The world sorely needs the disillusionment, the perspective, "the aloofness, impartiality, and power of generalization that age can best supply. . . . These were the qualities that enabled the venerable Joffre to make his masterly two-week's retreat at the Marne. It was done against the will and wish of every one of his younger generals, who now admit he saved Paris and the war and that he was, in a sense, a true superman. The world never so needed the wisdom, which learning cannot give, that sees the vanity and shallowness of narrow partisanship and jingoism, of creeds that conceal more than they reveal, of social shams that often veil corruption, the insanity of the money hunt that monopolizes most of the energy of our civilization, and realizes that with all our vaunted progress man still remains essentially juvenile—much as he was before history began. . . . What the world needs is a kind of higher criticism of life and all its institutions to show their latent beneath their patent value by true supermen who, like Zarathustra, are old, very old, with the sapience that long life alone can give. We need prophets with vision who can inspire and also castigate, to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Thus there is a new dispensation at the door which graybeards alone can usher in. Otherwise humanity will remain splendid but incomplete. Heir of all the ages, man has not yet come into his full heritage. A traveller, he sets out for a far and supreme goal but is cut off before he attains or even discerns it. The best part of his history is yet unwritten because it is unmade."

"Perhaps in the large Aristotelian sense of the word politics is *par excellence* the work of and for old age. . . . From the patriarchs down the old have been the wisest shepherds of the people, and if young men have succeeded in diplomacy it is because they have been prodigies of precocity who have also devoted themselves to an intensive study of history, which is at best only a proxy for experience. . . . The old who are really so, who are not merely spent projectiles, relics, vestiges, or ruins that time has chanced to spare, do sometimes attain vision and even prophetic power, and their last real words to the world they are leaving are not like the insane babblings of the dying, which friends so often cherish, but are often the best and most worth heeding by their juniors of all their counsels. Some have told us that if the long awaited superman ever arrives, he will come by way of the prolongation of adolescence and others have said it would be by the fuller maturity of man in his prime. No doubt both these stages of life would be enriched and potentialized, but his first advent and his greatest improvement over man of today will be in the form of glorified old age. Nietzsche was right in making Zarathustra old and he himself was the overman whose message he brought to the world. He was intent on the future of man and not on his present, still less on his past."

Dr. Hall fully realizes that there is no virtue in old age as such. Indeed, there are many old who are anything but venerable, wise, or good. Such virtues as old age has are fully earned, not inherent. "Many of those who attain advanced years are battered, water-logged, leaky derelicts without cargo or crew, chart, rudder, sail, or engine, remaining afloat only because they have struck no fatal rocks or because the storms have not quite yet swamped them; or, to change the figure, because they have withered, not ripened on the tree. . . . A psychological senility that neither learns nor forgets is always a menace and a check instead of being, as true old age should be, a guide in emergencies. Thus we have not grown old aright and are paralyzed by a wisdom that is obsolete or barnacled by prejudice. How often it is said of reforms great and good that they are earnestly needed and entirely practical but must wait for their accomplishment until certain venerable but obstructive personages of a generation that is passing are out of the way, because they are prone to think the old good and the new bad, and that every change, therefore, must be for the worse. Thus many live too

long and undo the usefulness of their earlier years. . . . It is because there are so many such that the rôle assigned to the best of us is often so hard and so repugnant to our nature and to our needs. . . . The very little that is known of old age is so predominantly of its inferior specimens, its unfavorable traits and defects and limitations that some old have been prone to repudiate their years, while others are sorely tempted to accept a sham old age that is false to the best that is in us, instead of justifying and illustrating a better one."

"Ripe old age has been a slow, late, precarious, but precious acquisition of the race, perhaps not only its latest but also its highest product. Its modern representatives are pioneers and perhaps its task will prove to be largely didactic. It certainly should go along with the corresponding prolongation of youth and increasing docility in the rising generation if we are right in charging ourselves with the duty of building a new story to the structure of human life. . . . To repeat, our function is to finish a structure that still lacks an upper story and give it an outlook or conning tower from which man can see more clearly the far horizon and take his bearings now and then by the eternal stars."

The above quotations are from the eighth chapter, which is the concluding chapter dealing with old age. The next and last chapter deals with the Psychology of Death. The other chapters may be briefly summarized as follows: Chapter 1. *The Youth of Old Age*. At about 35 or 40 there comes a realization that the tide that 'drew us out the boundless deep' begins to 'turn again home'. This is the dangerous age. Both sexes realize that they face the bankruptcy of some of their youthful hopes, and certain temperaments make a desperate, now-or-never effort to realize their extravagant expectations and are thus led to excesses of many kinds; while others capitulate to fate, lose heart, and perhaps even lose the will-to-live. Quotes Osler, "the evil genius, the croaking Poe raven of this period," whose two fixed ideas were "the comparative uselessness of man above forty years of age and the uselessness of men above sixty years of age, and the incalculable benefit it would be in commercial, political, and in professional life if, as a matter of course, man stopped work at this age." Quotes E. G. Dexter, W. A. Newman Dorland and E. S. P. Haynes as disputing these conclusions, and adds: "If and so far as Osler is right, it is because man up to the present has been abnormally precocious, a trait that he inherited from his shorter-lived precursors and has not yet outgrown, as is the case with sexual precocity, which brings premature old age. Modern man was not meant to do his best work before forty, but is by nature, and is becoming more and more so, an afternoon and evening worker. The coming superman will begin, not end, his real activity with the advent of the fourth decade. Not only with many personal questions but with most of the harder and more complex problems that affect humanity we rarely come to anything like a masterly grip till the shadows begin to slant eastward, and for a season, which varies greatly with individuals, our powers increase as the shadows lengthen. Thus as the world grows intricate and the stage of apprenticeship necessarily lengthens it becomes increasingly necessary to conserve all those higher powers of man that culminate late and it is just these that our civilization, that brings such excessive strains to middle life, now so tends to dwarf, making old age too often *blasé* and *abgelebt*, like the middle age of those rouses who in youth have lived too fast." Chapter 2. *History of Old Age*. Treats of the various ages attained by plants and animals, and the attitude toward (and treatment of) the aged among primitives, the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, the Middle Ages, and children. Everywhere, except among the Hebrews, the lot of the old was pathetic and even tragic, being ignored, neglected, abandoned, shorn of power and authority, put to death, and in times of famine eaten. The views of Cornaro, Bacon, Addison, Robert Burton and Jonathan Swift are quoted. Also Karl Pearson's theory of witchcraft as a revival of the ancient and widespread

matriarchate. . . . "In the eternal struggle of old people to maintain their power against the oncoming generations which would submerge or sweep them away, witchcraft on this view represents the very latest stage of a long and losing struggle of old women for place and influence who in the last resort did not scruple, handicapped though they were by ugliness, neglect, and contempt, to cling to the last remnants of their ancient prerogatives." Chapter 3. *Literature By and On the Aged*. Describes the various attitudes of literary men and women toward old age, followed by quotations from (or résumés of) the works of Margaret E. White, Harriet E. Paine, Amelia E. Barr, Mortimer Collins, Col. Nicholas Smith, Bryon C. Utecht, J. L. Smith, Sanford Bennett, G. E. D. Diamond, Cardinal Gibbons, John Burroughs, Rollo Ogden, James L. Ludlow, Brander Matthews, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Senator G. F. Hoar, William Dean Howells, H. D. Sedgwick, Walt Mason, E. P. Powell, U. D. Wilson, D. G. Brinton, N. S. Shaler, Anthony Trollope, Stephen Paget, Richard LeGallienne, G. S. Street, C. W. Saleeby, Bernard Shaw. Chapter 4. *Statistics of Old Age and its Care*. Life is probably twice as long as it was three or four centuries ago, and is increasing more rapidly now than ever. The rate of progress is very variable in different countries, the maximum being in Prussia. Improvement is most in females and the rate of increase is accelerated perhaps four years a century on the whole, although during the last three quarters of the nineteenth century Irving Fisher thinks it has increased nine years. At least fourteen years could be added to human life by eliminating preventable diseases. Offsetting the increase in the length of life is the intensity of modern life and industry, which steadily reduces the age of maximal efficiency so that the handicap of years is felt earlier in life than formerly. . . . Not only is the average length of human life increasing as civilization advances, but so is the relative and absolute number of old people, and those who now attain 60, 70, 80 and above are on the average far more comfortable than ever before. However, conditions of life in the modern city, and especially since the Industrial Revolution, are far from being ideal for the old. . . . Nearly every civilized country makes some provision for its aged poor. There are old-age pensions, insurance, annuities, and various provisions made by private corporations, unions, fraternal orders, insurance companies, and philanthropic foundations. The U. S. government is the only one that has no retiring system or provision for old age for its employees, save for soldiers and judges of the Supreme Court. . . . In institutions for the old they suffer most from mass-treatment, for they are not a class but are hyperindividualized, and need most of all personal attention. There is the greatest diversity in food, regimen, and in most bodily and psychic needs. . . . All have their own tastes, aptitudes, habits, as well as mementos and keepsakes, which should always be respected, and every possible facility should be given not only for visits and correspondence but for current reading in order to maintain a larger surface of contact with the world without. The old thus constitute, in a sense, a privileged and even a new "leisure class." Chapter 5. *Medical Views and Treatment of Old Age*. There are no gerontologists as there are experts for women and children, and therefore each senescent must be his own physician. Body-keeping for the old is a very pressing and personal problem requiring much time and attention, and the methods that are successful differ so widely that the diet and regimen good for one might be dangerous, if not fatal, for another. . . . The view so commonly held, that heredity is the chief factor in longevity, is doubtless correct in general. But it is fatalistic and directly tends to lessen the confidence of hygienists and physicians in the efficacy of all their methods of prolonging life in the aged. . . . The psychological effect of this dogma of the prepotence of heredity in determining the length of life is itself not only depressing but may readily become, as psychologists can best understand, a dangerous lethal agent with the old and cause those who have reached the span of years at which their forbears

died to succumb to their troubles with less resistance. Indeed it is one of the chief purposes of this volume to show that the old age problem is not merely economic, philanthropic, social, or even medical, but also, when all is said and done, perhaps chiefly psychological, and that the future welfare of the race depends upon the development of an old age due not chiefly to heredity but to better knowledge and control of the conditions of this state of life. Chapter 6. *The Contributions of Biology and Physiology*. Discusses succinctly the views on the cause of old age of Weismann, Elie Metchnikoff, C. S. Minot, Charles Manning Child, Jacques Loeb, Northrup, Carrel, Pearl, Pozzi, Claude Bernard, and the experiments of Brown-Séquard, Eugene Steinach, Serge Voronoff and their pupils on the rejuvenating effects of testicular fluids taken from young animals and injected into older ones; also of glandular transplantation and grafting; and concludes that "the only practical hope of easement from the hardships of senescence and for the postponement of death now tenable is that now arising faintly and tentatively that, some day, some mitigation of the terrors of old age and death may be found by glandular implantation or perhaps even by the injection of secretions of certain glands. . . . These studies are yet, however, in their infancy and it will be, at the best, a long time before we can know whether they are able to fulfill their promise to the human heart and to the will to live." Chapter 7. *Report on Questionnaire Returns*. Sent the following questionnaire to a few-score eminent and distinguished Americans. How and at what age did you first realize the approach of old age? To what do you ascribe your long life? How do you keep well, that is, what do you find especially good or bad in diet, regimen, interests, and personal hygiene generally? Are you troubled with regrets for things done or not done by or for you? What temptations do you feel, old or new? What duties do you feel that you still owe either to those about you or to the world? Is your interests in public, community, or in far future or past things, as compared with interest in persons and things right about you, greater or less than formerly? In what do you now take your greatest pleasure? Do you enjoy the society of children, of young people, adults, or those near your own age more or less than formerly? Would you live your life over again? Did you experience an "Indian summer" of revived energy before the winter of age began to set in? Do you rely more or less on doctors or find that you must study yourself and be your own doctor? Do you get more or less from the clergy and the church than formerly? Do you think or worry about dying or the hereafter more or less than formerly? Though respondents belonged practically to the same class, yet because of their age their individuation was so great as practically to preclude uniformity in their replies. As many respondents, almost so many different replies. Chapter 8. *Some Conclusions*. "To learn that we are really old is a long, complex and painful experience. Each decade the circle of the Great Fatigue narrows around us, restricting the intensity and the endurance of our activities. . . . At sixty we realize that there is but one more threshold to cross before we find ourselves in the great hall of discard where most lay their burdens down and that what remains yet to do must be done quickly. Hence this is a decade peculiarly prone to overwork. We refuse to compromise with failing powers but drive ourselves all the more because we are on the home stretch. We anticipate leaving but must leave things right and feel we can rest up afterwards. So we are prone to overdraw our account of energy and brave the danger of collapse if our overdraft is not honored. Thus some cross the conventional dead-line of seventy in a state of exhaustion that nature can never entirely make good. Added to all this is the struggle, never so intense for men as in the sixties, to seem younger, to be and remain necessary, and perhaps to circumvent the looming possibilities of displacement by younger men. Thus it is that men often shorten their lives and, what is far more important, impair the quality of their old age, so that we yet see and know

little of what it could, should, or would be if we could order life according to its true nature and intent. Only greater easement between fifty and seventy can bring right, healthful, vigorous senectitude, the services of which to the race constitute probably the greatest of our civilization to-day. . . . The seventieth is the saddest of all birthdays and if we 'linger superfluous on the stage', we feel that society regards us as, to some extent, a class apart; and so we instinctively make more effort to compensate our clumsiness by spryness and gently resist the kindly offices and tokens of respect to which the young incline or, perhaps more often, are taught to render the old. . . . It is not strange that one of our grievous dangers is patheticism. One who begins to suspect waning love on the part of those in his sphere may come to accept and even crave pity in its place. . . . There are fathers who, with no thought that they are selfish, monopolize the love and services of their daughters, and mothers who do the same of grown sons. . . . The old often feel a falsetto invalidism. . . . are particularly prone to develop peculiarities which tend to alienate those nearest to them, such as faults in table manners, neglect of toilet, soiled attire, objectionable noises in presence of others, pryingly overcurious, fault-finding, exacting, forgetful. . . . The old are subject to certain fluctuations, new in kind, degree, or both. Sleep is less regular. . . . appetites fluctuate and may readily become capricious. . . . There are alternations of moods. . . . greater dependence upon weather, climate, and seasons, winter being the hardest and spring the easiest. . . . even sex often does not decline and die without terminal oscillations in its course and in extreme cases apathy and aversion may alternate with abnormal erotic outbreaks dangerous alike to the health of the individual, to domestic happiness, and even to public morals. . . . There is mental starvation because the supplies of mental pabulum fail owing to the reduction of sensations and movements. . . . the days and years pass more slowly and fatigue sets in more quickly. . . . emotivity probably increases with years and most expressions of it, unless they become more sublimated, strongly tend to grow more crass and stormy. We were never more interested in things, persons, events, causes, in life itself. Sights rankle, neglect chills, attentions warm, affronts incense, and praise thrills us, and if we grow censorious, it is because our ideals of conduct and motive have become higher and purer and we are in a greater hurry to see them realized."

"Old age is called second childhood. This is all wrong for there is nothing rejuvenative about it. Childhood is the most active, healthful, buoyant, and intuitive stage of life; age, the least so. . . . The problem of personal hygiene looms up with new dimensions. In our prime we give little attention to health. . . . but now our credit at the bank of health begins to run low. . . . we must select the items of our dietary with discretion and self-restraint. . . . If current events impress and absorb us less, we knit up the past, present, and future into a higher unity." The remainder of this chapter, which is the best and most original in the book, was epitomized in the opening paragraphs of this review. Chapter 9. *The Psychology of Death*. "From infancy to old age the conceptions of death undergo characteristic changes in the individual not unlike those through which the race has passed. . . . Death is not only the king of terrors but to the genetic psychologist every fear is at bottom the fear of death, for all the scores of phobias that prey upon man are of things and of experiences that abate life. . . . The fear of death or of life-abatement for the individual is no whit less pervasive and dominant than are love and hunger, which are so often said to rule the world. . . . Man became man when he knew he must die, and to defer or escape death has been the basal motivation of all his culture. . . . Man may thus be redefined as the death-shunner. He does not and cannot begin to realize how much he fears death and dreads it now and always has. . . . The most essential claim of Christianity is to have obviated through its doctrines of the other world, resurrection, and personal immortality,

the fear of death and made the king of terrors into a good friend, if not into a boon companion....but this belief persists only as a dead article of faith which men no longer live by. It is a desiccated herbarium specimen and not a living plant...."

The psychical factors that have overdetermined the hope-wish of personal immortality are as follows:

(1) The desire to be remembered and esteemed by survivors.
 (2) The desire to do things that will affect those who survive or will perpetuate our will and works to those who know little or nothing of us or of our name. "Jubal's fame and art filled all the sky, while Jubal lonely laid him down to die," supremely happy in the thought that he had done the race a great service.

(3) The third killer of the death-fear is children and posterity.

(4) The need of another world and life to compensate for the wrongs and imperfections of this one. However, our actual *modus vivendi* is as if another life did not exist and death were the end. No priestcraft can longer make men content with misery here in the hope of compensation hereafter. All make the most and best of this life as if it were all they were sure of, and the motto of most believers is, "One life at a time and this one now."

(5) Another killer of the death-fear is the discovery of physics and chemistry that "death is not only non-existent but inconceivable.... Matter is not only not dead but more intensely active than mind. Transformations take place, but not a single ion dies or is lost."

(6) Mysticism, pantheism, and noetic theories of immortality teach the same thing concerning the individual soul. It does not die but becomes absorbed into the All-Soul.

(7) Philosophy too, from Plato on, has advanced many arguments to prove the immortality of the soul.

"But the fear of death and the forms of mitigating this fear are chiefly because man still dies young. If we had experienced and explored senescence fully we should find that the lust of life is supplanted later by an equally strong counter will to die. We should have no immortality mania for we should be satisfied with life here without demanding a sequel to it. Our present dreams of all forms of post-mortem existence would become a nightmare. True macrobiotism means not only more years but completeness of experience, absence of repression and limitation. Had we lived out the whole of our lives and drained all the draughts of bitter and sweet that nature has ever breathed for us, we should feel sated.

"The fact is, man is now cut off in his prime with many of his possibilities unrealized. Hence he is a pathetic creature doomed to a kind of Herodian slaughter and because he has dimly felt this he has always cried out to the gods and to nature to have mercy. He has imagined answers to the heartrending appeals he shouted into the void; if man dies shall he live again? and on the warrant of fancied answers has supplemented this by another life, which, when psycho-analyzed in all its processess, means only that he has a sense that the human race is unfinished and that the best is yet to come. And so it is. Man's future on this earth is the real, only, and gloriously sufficient fulfillment of this hope. It will be found only in the prolonged and enriched life of posterity here. The man of virtue will realize all desires and live himself completely out so that nothing essentially human will be foreign to his own personal experience.

"Thus the wish for and belief in immortality is at bottom the very best of all possible augurs and pledges that man as he exists today is only the beginning of what he is to be and do. He is only the pigmoid or embryo of his true and fully entelechized self. Thus when he is completed and has finished all that is now only begun in him, heavens, hells, gods, and discarnate ghosts will all fade like dream fabrics or shadows before the rising sun. All doctrines of another life are thus but symbols and tropes in mythic form of the true superman as he will be when he arrives. The great hope so many

have lived and died by will be fulfilled, every jot and tittle of it, not in our own lives but in the perfect man whose heralds we really are without knowing it. Deathbed visions will come true more gloriously than the dying thought. They hunger for more life but the perfect man will die of satiety passing over into aversion and the story will be completed not in a later number but in this."

Of course the long and painstaking studies that produced the two-volumed *Adolescence*, *Educational Problems*, and *Jesus, the Christ* made possible the production of this last volume in considerably less time and with less labor than were expended upon them; and while the specific gravity, so to speak, of the *Senescence* is not as high as that of its predecessors, nor probably was intended to be, there is no mistaking its authorship from first page to last. Though struck off quickly as a minor work, it shows throughout the master's touch, and it can be safely said that there is in no language a work on the subject so comprehensive and discriminating as this one. Moreover, if the function and service of the supersenescents of the future will be to synthesize, "to draw from accumulated experience and knowledge the ultimate and especially the moral lessons of life—in a word, to sum up in a broader view the net results of all we have learned of the *Comédie humaine*", then has this macrobiotic author proved himself a splendid forerunner of the species he has so ably analyzed and described. In the language of the street, *Senescence* is a big book by a Grand Old Man.

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